

MAIN STREET CREDITS

Portfolio Assessment of Prior Learning

A Faculty Guide

Nashua Community College offers students the option of receiving college credit for college level learning that has taken place outside of the college classroom. Typically, this learning has taken place through workplace training, learning on the job, volunteering, self-study, etc. This document is meant to offer guidance for faculty when assessing a student's portfolio for college credit.

Students who receive credits through Prior Learning Assessment typically:

- Gain confidence that they have what it takes to acquire college level learning
- Are encouraged to pursue additional education
- Have higher graduation rates and graduate sooner than their non PLA peers
- Reach their career goal sooner
- Save time and money

One way in which a student can demonstrate proof of their prior learning is by developing a portfolio. **It is important to note that credit should awarded for the student's knowledge and not their experience.** Students may show up for every class during a semester, but if they cannot demonstrate their learning, they do not earn credit for the course. It is the same with the portfolio process. Students must demonstrate their learning throughout their portfolio.

Once a student has completed the "Request for Experiential Learning Credits" form and has acquired the necessary signatures and approval, it is time for the student to meet with the faculty assessor to discuss the process of portfolio development. It is a good idea to have the student develop an outline of what their portfolio will consist of to give you an idea if the student should move forward with the portfolio. For example, if a student participated in manufacturing type courses in high school and has several years of work experience in a manufacturing environment that correlates with the course(s) he/she wishes to earn credit for, and can name the competencies he has

acquired, then you can determine that developing a portfolio is a good route for the student to take. Also, it is recommended that you read through the Student PLA Manual so that you can answer questions the student may have once they have read through it.

Discussion points between faculty and student:

- If students intend to transfer their NCC credits to another institution they should check that the intended institution will accept the credit for prior learning in transfer.
- There should be a balance between theory and practical application demonstrated by the student in order to receive credit.
- Faculty should provide students with a written document of the learning outcomes and/or competencies of the course for which the student will need to demonstrate their knowledge.
- Faculty should discuss with the student how to best demonstrate their learning through their portfolio.
- Examples of documentation of learning to be included in a Portfolio could include:
 - An essay written by the student documenting their learning backed up by a verification letter from an employer)
 - Written documents (blueprints, graphs, charts, data analysis)
 - Examples of presentations
 - Video
 - Photographs
 - Manuals
 - Research studies
 - Schematics
 - Designs
 - Diagrams
 - Patents
 - Live presentations, demonstrations or lab work
- The next step would be for students to develop an outline of their portfolio and submit it to the faculty assessor for comment. The assessor will want to let

the student know if adjustments need to be made. Once the outline is approved, the student can move forward with the “heart” of the portfolio.

- Some students may need more guidance than others, therefore faculty and student can determine how often to meet for a “check-in”. Alternatively, students and faculty could communicate online and by phone.

Components of a portfolio should contain:

1. Title Page

Includes the subject for which students are requesting credit or prior learning, their name and the date.

2. Table of contents

3. List of skills/competencies.

4. Essay

The essay is the document in which students articulate what they know, how they learned it, and the resulting accomplishments. It should also include the following:

- An introduction, a description of their school or work experience (prior learning that they feel is college credit worthy) and their career objectives
- Comprehensive description and examples of their learning, where and when it took place
- The results of the learning/work performed

5. Verification Letter

The essay/documentation provided must be verifiable. Credit cannot be assigned simply because students say they possess the knowledge. Verification usually comes in the form of a letter from a past or present supervisor or manager that contains the following information:

- An introduction of themselves which includes his/her credentials, experience and the capacity in which they know you.

- The length of time student and supervisor worked together
- Description of student's responsibilities during that time
- The learning student acquired on the job, how they demonstrated that learning (projects, accomplishments, etc.) and the results of their work – how it improved the work environment. (processes, quality, safety, communication, etc.)

6. Other Sources of Documentation that may be included:

- Examples of work which may include written documents, blueprints, presentations, research manuals, drawings, parts schematics, designs, diagrams, photos, etc.
- Video of work – a co-worker could use a camera or smart phone to video student performing a relevant process of their job responsibilities
- Letters of recommendation received from a supervisor
- Performance evaluations
- Certificates or training records
- Transcripts
- In addition, you may determine if a student is required to complete a project or work in the lab in order to fully demonstrate their learning.

7. Bibliography

The bibliography will provide a snapshot of the student's learning, when and where it took place. In addition, if the student was self-taught the material used should be listed as well. (Book, MOOC, etc.)

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